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University of Montana Commencement

Max S. Baucus

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(1) Subject*: **University of Montana Commencement Address**
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DOCUMENT DATE*: **05/13/2000**

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* "required information"
Thank you President Dennison for that warm introduction. It is such a pleasure to be back here in the Garden City. Because this is where I started my career and that would have been many moons ago. Very many.

Let me first turn to my good friends, Dr. Reber and Dr. Molen to extend my congratulations for an honor well deserved. (Lead applause)

I also want to extend a personal note about former MSU President Mike Malone: He was a great friend to me and to Montana. And I am sure George agrees, his leadership and commitment to education serve as an example for all of us.
Let me also congratulate all of our graduates.

Today, the dream of a college education becomes a reality. And you leave UM with more than a diploma. You leave with memories of friends, activities, and yes, even your classes.

-You may remember the friendly person at the UC market who made you that rocket fuel they call coffee that got you through that 8 o’clock.

-You might remember the gourmet all-you-can eat menu at the lodge. Or spending out your meal-plan on cases of Snapple and other goodies at the cascade country store on Friday afternoons.
-You might remember, or may not, Friday nights at Stockman's, the Ritz, Sean Kelly's, Iron Horse or the Top Hat. Burgers at the mo-club.

-The farmers market on spring Sundays. Killer sandwiches at Warden's Market.

-Hiking the "M", or at least thinking about hiking it.

-Begging and pleading with your professors to give you one more extension on that paper or to retake a test. Pulling a true all-nighter, complete with the 3:30am Kinkos run.

These are memories that you will hold forever as you should, because graduation day is your day.
This is a day for parents to share in the pride of their children's achievements. And it is a day for you as graduates to recognize the enormous potential of your accomplishments.

This is a day when you can truly say to mom and dad, see I told you so.

But graduation day is also a day when we – as Montanans – should take stock by marking the changes that have occurred in our state as we prepare to send our best and brightest on their individual paths to success.

Today, this country is enjoying its longest and strongest economic expansion in our history. Today, 21 million new jobs have been created countrywide, national
unemployment is at an all time low, and there is solid income growth across all income groups.

And it is true, Montana has benefitted from some of this growth. But the reality is that today, in the midst of this unprecedented national boom, we stand at 47th in per capita income.

Why? Why are we third to last in statewide income and most important how can we ensure that this group Montana’s finest stay in the state we are so proud of and find good paying jobs?

These are the challenges before all of us gathered here.
We as a state cannot succeed if we keep exporting our talented students to Denver, Boise, Salt Lake City, Portland and Seattle. We need to give you a reason to stay in Missoula, Bozeman, Great Falls, Billings and even Twodot.

Many have spoken about this country’s “digital divide”.

Today, Montana stands on the brink of an “economic divide” – the choice before us: whether to move forward and embrace the changing world around us or simply run in place and keep the status quo.

Well I can tell you this, finishing 47th in a 50 state marathon is not the Montana way.
The future of our state’s success has never been rooted in complacency. It is grounded in our common commitment to dynamic action educated by Montana’s enduring values.

If Montana is to continue to succeed and grow beyond its current income status, then we must all make a commitment to this action.

For years we have relied on natural resource extraction jobs. Timber, mining, agriculture, built this great state; shaped our heritage, shaped our values. But, over time these industries have declined.

High-paying jobs have all but vanished and no jobs exist to replace them.
The boom and bust mentality is quickly becoming a relic of the past.

And now Montana finds itself in the midst of a New Economy. But we haven't yet fully embrace it.

We must put into place reliable infrastructure, bandwidth and affordable high-speed Internet access. These tools are crucial to our children and college graduates getting the skills to compete in a new economy and to attracting new businesses to our state.

We cannot forget our past, but as many have said, “It's alright to look back -- just don’t stare.”

We have the ability, by working together, to shape our destiny — write our own chapter.
Attracting new businesses and people to our state and protecting our way of life are not mutually exclusive.

We need a can-do attitude and a Montana-made solution.

I intend on bringing people together from all over the state and nation to address these issues at an economic development summit I’m holding in Great Falls in June.

If we as Montanans are to excel in the new economy, we need a road map for Montana’s economic future.

Having said that, it seems to me that the foundation for our advancement lies with you, the next generation of Montana leaders.
I implore you all to take ownership of Montana's entry into this new economy.

Before you lies a future of unparalleled possibility.

Given the right tools, we'll run forward to the front of the pack. I know this. I see it in the people I meet all around Montana. I see it in you here today.

So with your bags packed and your dorm rooms closed for good, I stand before you with one final assignment that is not pass or fail, will not be graded on a curve and cannot be audited -- go out and write the next chapter of your careers and in doing so, this state's future, starting today.
You have lived your whole lives under the rules set by my generation. Now is the time to set some new rules.

You are graduating into a time of immense possibility -- here in Montana, throughout the United States and, indeed, throughout the world.

You understand the opportunities, doubtless, better than I.

But I hope you recognize the challenges too, for yourselves and the future of our state.

Economic opportunity for Montana is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end -- to strengthen the bonds of our community, to enable you to build families, have
children, enrich your lives and to enable our state to thrive.

And just as we as a nation are working to close the digital divide in this 21st century, so too must Montana meet the challenges of our economic divide while holding fast to our state's oldest and most cherished values: independence; common sense; and doing what's right for Montana.

Yours is the first graduating class of this century.

Decide where you want your state to be by becoming the pioneers of Montana's future. Blaze a trail for a 21st century Montana that derives every benefit from technology while maintaining the integrity of our proud heritage.
On behalf of your parents, teachers, loved ones, and friends, I congratulate you. Continue to make us proud.

Thank you all very, very much.

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